Drinking Water Safety

Remember: If you store water in your own bottles, rotate it every six months. If you buy bottles and keep them sealed, you can keep them for at least a year, or as recommended by the bottler.

In an emergency, you will need water for drinking, food preparation and hygiene. Plan on having at least **one gallon per person, per day** on hand.

Never ration water. Drink the amount you need today, and try to find more for tomorrow. You can minimize the amount of water your body needs by reducing activity and staying cool.

Storing Water

- Use thoroughly washed plastic, glass, fiberglass or enamel-lined metal containers.
- Make sure the water storage container you plan to use is of food grade quality, such as 2-liter soda bottles, with tight-fitting screw-cap lids. Milk containers are not recommended for drinking water because they do not seal well
- Never use a container that has held toxic substances.
- Seal water containers tightly, label them and store in a cool, dark place.
- Rotate water every six months. One way to do this is to keep a bottle in your refrigerator, for cold drinking water. When it is empty, fill it and put it "at the back of the line" and put the next bottle in the refrigerator. (If you have bought water in a sealed contained, you can keep it safely up to a year, or as recommended by the bottler.)

Emergency Outdoor Water Sources

It's always better to obtain drinking water from a source that you know to be pure (public water supply, bottled water). However, if in an emergency you need to find water outside your home from one of these sources, **be sure to purify the water before drinking it**. It is important to tpurify any water of unknown quality. Water that looks clear can be contaminated.

- Rainwater
- Streams, rivers and other moving bodies of water
- Ponds and lakes
- Natural springs

Avoid water with floating material, an odor or dark color. Use saltwater only if you distill it first (see below). You should never drink flood water.

If you have a well that has been flooded the water should be tested and disinfected after the waters recede. **Do not** try to disinfect a well that is still under water. For a six inch wide well that is 300 feet deep, one gallon of household bleach is needed. If you think your well may be contaminated, contact the Maine Drinking Water Program 24 hours a day at 557-4214.

Three Ways to Purify Water

You must purify all water of uncertain purity before using it for drinking, food preparation or hygiene.

There are many ways to purify water. None is perfect. Often the best solution is a combination of methods. Before purifying:

- Let any suspended particles settle to the bottom, or strain them through layers of paper towel or clean cloth.

Boiling:

Boiling is the safest method of purifying water.

- Bring water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes.
- Let the water cool before drinking.
- Improve the taste by pouring the water back and forth between two clean containers. (This will also improve the taste of stored water.)

Disinfection:

- Use **only** regular household liquid bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite
- **Do not use** scented bleaches, colorsafe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners.
- Add 10 to 15 drops of bleach per quart of clear water, stir and let stand for 30 minutes.
- If the water does not have a slight bleach odor, repeat the dosage and let stand another 15 minutes.

Distillation:

Distillation will remove microbes not removed by boiling or disinfection, as well as heavy metals, salts and most other chemicals.

- Fill a pot halfway with water.
- Tie a cup to the handle on the pot's lid so that the cup will hang right-side-up when the lid is upside-down (make sure the cup is not dangling into the water)
- Boil the water for 20 minutes.

The water that drips from the lid into the cup is distilled.

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